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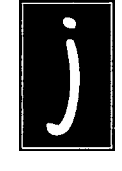
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ARTICLE

Ethnic media, community media and participatory culture

Mark Deuze
Indiana University, USA

ABSTRACT

Several recent studies document the rapid growth and success of ethnic or minority media in, for example, North America and Western Europe. Scholars in the field tend to attribute this trend as an expression of increasing worldwide migration patterns. In this article this explanation is challenged by locating the proliferation of these (news) media in a wider social trend: the worldwide emergence of all kinds of community, alternative, oppositional, participatory and collaborative media practices, in part amplified by the internet. A critical awareness of an increasingly participatory global media culture in multicultural societies is developed as a necessary tool to explain the success and impact of ethnic or minority media, as well as to embrace the changing ways in which people 'use' their media.

KEY WORDS ▪ ethnic media ▪ journalism ▪ minority media ▪ multiculturalism ▪ social theory

What American scholars and professionals tend to call 'ethnic' media (see the title of this special issue, Ethnic Media and Audiences in America: Growing Beyond the Margins), and their European colleagues and policymakers refer to as 'minority' media have always been popular among their specific target audiences (see, for example, Wilson et al., 2003: 263ff), but have grown exponentially especially since the late 20th century. 'Forty-five percent of all African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American and Arab American adults prefer ethnic television, radio or newspapers to their mainstream counterparts,' summarizes a March 2005 survey in the United States commissioned by New California Media – an association of over 700 ethnic media organizations in the USA (NCM, 2005). A relevant example in Europe would be the situation in the Netherlands, where the number and reach of (particularly print) media produced by and for minority groups has been growing steadily, especially in the period between 1999 and 2003

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(Meulensteen, 2003). Similar developments can be signaled across multicultural societies in Wallerstein's 'First World', and have led scholars in the field to see the fast-paced growth of ethnic, minority and diasporic media in Western multicultural societies as an expression of increasing worldwide migration patterns to these countries (Georgiou, 2005).

In this article I would like to challenge the suggested causal relationship between the rise and increasing popularity of ethnic/minority media and immigration flows by locating the success of these (news) media in a wider social trend: the worldwide emergence of all kinds of community, alternative, oppositional, participatory and collaborative media practices. The development of such media in the context of journalism has been coined as the rise of community media (Jankowski and Prehn, 2002), 'we media' (Bowman and Willis, 2003), citizen's media (Rodriguez, 2001), grassroots journalism (Gillmor, 2004), and other more or less radical alternatives to mainstream journalistic practice emerging both online (Atton, 2004), and offline (Howley, 2005).[1]

The advantage of this approach is that it (artificially) disconnects 'ethnic' from 'media', refocusing our attention to the more or less contemporary social praxis of what American punk rock musician and political activist Jello Biafra (real name, Eric Boucher) has celebrated as people who 'become the media' (2000). In this context, becoming the media refers to the trend among people all over the world – especially in Western 'liquid modern' capitalist democracies like North America, Europe (West, East and Central), southern Africa and Australasia – to be increasingly engaged in some type of media-making on and of their own. It must be noted that becoming the media also refers to a perspective on the media audience as active producers of meaning from within their own cultural context (Barker, 2003: 325). Production in this context should be understood in the broadest possible sense, as it refers to making media, varying from the professional production of a weekly newspaper to the offbeat exchange of comments on the website of a suburban community. It also should be noted here that citizen's media and successful local commercial media are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the *State of the News Media 2004* report by the US-based Project for Excellence in Journalism (2005) signaled a rapid growth of commercially successful independent ethnic media with a distinct local focus. Similar trends have been reported in Europe (Husband, 1994; Georgiou, 2005). Next to the emergence of a participatory and regional media culture and ongoing global migration patterns, the growth of ethnic media must also be attributed to global market forces, stimulating the proliferation of relatively small-scale, special-interest ventures targeting a wide variety of *niche* audiences (see, for example, De Beer and Merrill, 2004).

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Several authors in recent years have documented the long history of different types of media production by and for people in small-scale geographical, interest-based or virtual communities, indicating a significant shift from merely consuming media to individually or collaboratively producing media. Jankowski and Prehn (2002), for example, argue how the inclusion of community residents, non-professionals and local volunteers in the ownership structure and production process is the key characteristic of community media. In the USA, McChesney and Nichols (2002) have heralded the power of non-commercial community media as a legitimate counterforce against transnational corporations (TNCs) such as Viacom or NewsCorp. However, the success of local, minority, community or alternative media in reconnecting 'media' with 'audiences' in terms of some kind of collaborative civic engagement is not the exclusive domain of not-for-profit companies. Balnaves et al. (2004) consider the shift towards a more engaged, emancipatory and participatory relationship between media professionals and their publics as an example of a 'new humanism' in the domains of public relations, journalism and advertising, constituting 'an antidote to narrow corporate-centric ways of representing interests in modern society' (p.192). It is my point of departure that a critical awareness of an increasingly participatory global media culture in multicultural societies can and should be a useful tool in explaining the success and impact of ethnic or minority media.

Ethnic media: difference and complexity

The mentioned developments regarding the continuing popularity and widespread reach of different types of ethnic, minority and diasporic media seem to go hand in hand with an international trend of declining and fragmenting audiences for mainstream media, especially regarding nationwide news media. Indeed, it is the segmentation of niche audiences across multiple media in particular that has policymakers, media managers and scholars up in arms (Turow, 1997; Wilson et al., 2003: 304). In contemporary (Western) society, much can be made of the ongoing loss of social cohesion propelled by the joint forces of globalization (Beck, 2001), individualization (Bauman, 2001), and multiculturalism (Parekh, 1997). If one adds media to this mix, Sreberny (2005: 444) asks, does this 'actually work to reify difference rather than support complexity?' This concern is grounded in an expectation of news media as providers of the social cement of societies, and of journalism functioning as one of the building blocks of the modern nation-state. As Carey (1996) has noted explicitly:

> Journalism is another name for democracy or, better, you cannot have journalism without democracy. The practices of journalism are not self-justifying; rather,

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they are justified in terms of the social consequences they engender, namely the constitution of a democratic social order.

Indeed, modern journalism has consistently defined and legitimized itself as such (Zelizer, 2004), claiming to adhere to a social responsibility of public service regarding the democratic state, summarized by Costera Meijer (2001: 13) as: 'informing citizens in a way that enables them to act as citizens'. This modernist view of news and journalism in society can be considered to be threatened if one reads another conclusion from the 2005 New California Media (NCM) survey:

> The reach of the 'national' newspapers among ethnic adults is limited. Only about 5 percent of Hispanics read USA Today, the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal frequently. One-tenth of Asian and Arab Americans and one-seventh of African Americans reported reading one of the 'national' newspapers every day or a few times a week. (NCM, 2005)

Among the main minority groups in the Netherlands – Turks, Moroccans, Surinamers and Antilleans/Arubans – qualitative and quantitative research shows that their media use (including, but not limited to participating in online media like chat sessions or discussion forums) is not significantly different from indigenous Dutch people, and that minority respondents are critical of the way they are portrayed by the Dutch media, not recognizing themselves in Dutch media content (d'Haenens et al., 2000). The reach of mainstream Dutch news media among ethnic minorities in the countries – some 18 percent of the total population – is limited, not in the least because journalists tend to translate their public service ideal regarding ethnic minorities in problems 'they' cause for the rest of 'us' in Dutch society (Deuze, 2004: 50).

The attention paid to diversity issues in general and ethnic minority issues in particular in European mainstream media has gone down in recent years, prompting a network of over 740 multicultural and media organizations, representatives of ethnic minorities, politicians and individuals in 49 different countries to draw up a 'European Manifesto of Minority Community Media' in 2004, calling for recognition of minority community media as a basic public service. This manifesto was presented to Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament, on 29 April 2004. What was particularly interesting about this manifesto was the way 'ethnic' media were defined, stressing the participatory and symbiotic nature (with mainstream media and other organizations) of such media:

> Minority community media are often local, sometimes regional or national initiatives. They provide their audiences with essential information, in their own language where appropriate, helping them to participate as equal citizens of their country of residence. They provide a platform for discussion and exchange

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> within the minority communities as well as between the minority and the majority communities. (OL/MCM, 2004)

What seems to be happening is a dual development of increasing use and popularity of (minority) community media with a strong participatory or dialogical element, and a marginalizing of such media in the dominant discourse and practices of (national, much more monological) mainstream media. Academic research on minority ethnic media heralds such sites of media production as 'shaping a vigorous public sphere' (Husband, 2005: 461), yet at the same time policymakers and scholars lament the ongoing fragmentation of contemporary society. In short, it almost seems the growing popularity of ethnic media disrupts the very fabric of contemporary (Western, national) society.

News media's credibility crisis

Perhaps one should take a step back, and consider the following conclusion from a series of research projects by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (2005: 42):

> Sitting down with the news on a set schedule has become a thing of the past for many time-pressured Americans [. . .] More people are turning away from traditional news outlets [. . .] At the same time, public discontent with the news media has increased dramatically. Americans find the mainstream media much less credible than they did in the mid-1980s. They are even more critical of the way the press collects and reports the news. More ominously, the public also questions the news media's core values and morality.

A similar conclusion was drawn by researchers in the Netherlands in a 2003 report on the increasing public disenchantment with the way news media and national politics seemed to be only serving each other rather than the people (RMO, 2003). On the other hand, the aforementioned NCM survey also brought another major finding:

> Even though the ethnic populations studied tend to rely on the ethnic media for information about their communities and countries of origin; African Americans, Asian Americans, Arab Americans and Native Americans prefer the mainstream media when it comes to information about politics and the U.S. government. (NCM, 2005)

Although this suggests mainstream institutional news still seems to be the exclusive realm of national (and to some extent, regional) corporate news media, this in fact might be the problem of these media: it is exactly this overreliance on institutional news reflecting the views and perspectives of the ruling class that has widened the gap between journalists and their audience (Rosen, 1999). It is crucial to note that the credibility crisis of news media vis-

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a-vis their publics is not particular to minorities *anymore*. Throughout the history of ethnic media one can see patterns of growing dissatisfaction with mainstream media, a distinct sense of crisis and an increased sense of civic engagement among the minority group involved (Wilson et al., 2003: 286). Perhaps it is only now that this sense of uncertainty and disbelief has become widespread among the dominant classes in contemporary Western society that it becomes possible to argue that people using and making their own individual, local and communal media is the structural condition of media, culture and society relationships, whereas the notion of national mass media telling an invisible audience what they 'need to know' is an anomalous trend particular to the forming of modern nation-states (Shirky, 2000; Couldry, 2004). In this sense the success of ethnic media is not so much a function of 'ethnic', but of 'media'.

The rise of media

Recent work collected by Hartley (2005) shows how people all over the world translate their resistance to, or frustration with, the products of the corporate mainstream media (which tend to be seen as a rather exclusive Western, white, male-dominated and capitalist domain; see Thussu, 1998) in acts of more or less independent, collaborative or participatory media-making. Rather than considering such activities as 'oppositional' (Eliasoph, 1988), 'radical' (Downing, 2000), or 'alternative' (Atton, 2001), Rodriguez suggests we should coin these as examples of *citizen's media*, if only to prevent an all-too-easy dichotomous relationship vis-a-vis corporate mass media, as she argues: 'these sites of media production bloom in an astounding variety of contexts, complicating a scenario made up exclusively of media conglomerates and their active audiences' (2001: 26). Beyond the binary opposition Rodriguez' work offers us a more complex vision of media consumption and production, which later work by Atton (2004) regarding online journalism, for example, also recognizes. Rodriguez (2001: 33ff) draws a useful distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous citizen's media, locating the emergence and growing popularity of the latter in the First World – the area of main concern in this essay – particularly in the 1970s (USA) and 1980s (in Europe and Australia). All of these media practices intensified at the end of the 20th century, not in the least because of the powerful open publishing and social networking potential of the World Wide Web in the 1990s (Bowman and Willis, 2003: 11–15), and the growing interest of commercial companies in marketing to increasingly specific segments of the audience. In this context, commercialization can be seen as a progressive force, as it enabled small-scale media companies to introduce and market local and regional media aimed at minority groups more

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or less independent of the conservative cultures of multinational corporations. Regarding the characteristics of citizen's media, Rodriguez (2001: 20) argues:

> . . . referring to 'citizens' media' implies first that a collectivity is enacting its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations; and third, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible.

The active intervention of a collectivity can be both the making and using of media, where resistance to dominant codes and discourses can be enacted by not watching CNN, not reading the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (or, theoretically speaking, by aberrantly decoding such media), or by printing a community newsletter, subscribing to the US-based *Pacific News Service* news wire, and perhaps even starting an individual or group weblog. It must be made clear here that I am not saying that ethnic or diasporic media are by definition collaboratively produced media, that these are non-commercial by default, or that when considering such minority media the distinction between producers and consumers is necessarily lost. However, it does seem that the most inspiring and – paraphrasing Rorty (1999) – socially hopeful way to understand the success of all kinds of media is to look at the ways in which such media act to include people's voices as participants, next to and, perhaps, more so than trying to represent their voices as audiences.

The everyday praxis of minority community media as located somewhere on the continuum between participatory communication (Dervin and Huesca, 1997) and ethnic media production (Husband, 2005) suggests these media and their constituencies are rather typical examples of what Jenkins (2004 and 2006) has called convergence culture. The core characteristic of this culture – as it consists of more or less contemporary emergent norms, values and patterns of activities that blur the boundaries between media production and media consumption – according to Jenkins must be seen as both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process. On the one hand this trend enables companies to foster consumer loyalty and generate low-cost content aimed at an audience that seems to be increasingly willing to put their voluntary engagement in the service of commercial corporations. On the other hand, this kind of consumer sovereignty can have progressive impact on the (self-) efficacy of minority communities, especially when one considers the generally local and small-scale nature of ethnic media.

The rise of citizen's media can be located in commercial and technological as well as social trends, without unique causality in any one of these explanations. This argument fuels Sreberny's (2005) call for a 'not only, but also'

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perspective on the complex ways people use and make media. In our operationalizations and explanations, room must be made for ethnic media as multiple expressions of 'ethnic' and of 'media', including but not limited to seeking information about the 'old' and the 'new' home, and making and using media. Convergence culture is a useful concept to catch such a variety of social, cultural, yet also political and economic trends at the same time. Jenkins (2004: 37) describes this emerging participatory media culture as a process where:

> Media companies are learning how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities [. . .] Consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control [. . .] They are fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture, to control the flow of media in their lives and to talk back to mass market content. Sometimes, these two forces reinforce each other, creating closer, more rewarding, relations between media producers and consumers.

Even though Jenkins' work does not address the social issues regarding the multicultural society, his argument seems helpful if one wants to cast a wider analytical net when considering the success and proliferation of the media by and for ethnic minorities. Let me reiterate that I see ethnic/minority media ultimately as expressions of this convergence culture, typified by more diffuse and complex relationships between consumers and producers, between content and connectivity, and between what one could consider as cohesive or corrosive functions of (news) media.

Corrosion and cohesion as functions of media

It is not the purpose of this article to fully explore the rich literatures on participatory communication and journalism, community media, alternative media, ethnic media or the wide variety of more or less collectivity-based modes of using and making media emerging online. What does seem helpful is an appreciation of the similar social trend all of these developments signal: whatever people do with media is infinitely more complex than can be explained by either ethnicity or community, or as resistance to the worldview of the Walt Disney Company. In that sense I would like to argue that (ethnic) media signify a function of media in the everyday life of people that is cohesive *as well as* corrosive. This functionality can be attributed both to the ways people use and produce (or market) such media. As studies in the USA and elsewhere show, avid readers, listeners or viewers of ethnic media expect to find news and information about what Sreberny identifies as three different yet recombinant topics: the country of origin, the current country or place of

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residence, and 'the world of new diasporas' (2005: 445). Riggins (1992) argues how ethnic minority media thus both foster ethnic cohesion and cultural maintenance and help minorities integrate into the larger society. Citizen's media thus reduce as well as increase cultural complexity in terms of a community's identity-formation process. First, it is important to note that all media serve these purposes, as the role of mass media in everyday life can best be seen in terms of what Luhmann suggests as generating 'a reality not subject to consensus' (2000[1996]: 92). Whatever representation ethnic media generate, it is one that at the same time seamlessly reproduces and critically negotiates the content of the mainstream mass media in any given society, and thus reflects the various ways in which people 'read' both preferred and aberrant versions of mediated reality. Second, paraphrasing the work of Schudson on contemporary citizenship vis-a-vis the media, it must be clear that people use media monitorially:

> Monitorial citizens scan (rather than read) the informational environment in a way so that they may be alerted on a very wide variety of issues for a very wide variety of ends and may be mobilized around those issues in a large variety of ways. (1999: 310)

The key here is the suggested 'mixed' relationship between activity and passivity, between engagement and disconnect. Using or making your own media (in the broadest sense, thus including anything between a Dutch online discussion forum like Maroc.nl, British web-based refugee support groups (Siapera, 2005), and an American commercial broadcast cable station like Black Entertainment Television) if anything suggests a more, not less, deliberate attitude regarding media, practicing 'environmental surveillance more than information-gathering' (Schudson, 1999: 311). This suggests that ethnic media, whether successful or not, would not by their mere existence contribute to a more fragmented or culturally diverse society. Minority media become part of the media diet of people without necessarily replacing other, existing (mass) media on offer – thus becoming part of what can be called our 'media meshing' behavior. Third, let me refer back to Jenkins' concept of convergence culture which he applies to the study of the different ways people engage and interact with the products of mainstream popular media culture (like *Star Wars*, *Survivor* and *The Matrix*). Sreberny (2005: 457) suggests in the context of the way ethnic minorities use media one should talk of 'multicultural convergence', which refers to an ongoing (but in the political and scholarly literature often invisible) blurring of the lines between different groups, cultures and peoples in multicultural societies like, for example, Great Britain.

Let me emphasize that these arguments do not explain away existing theories of ethnic media production. Indeed, I do not want to be accused of either using the different concepts of convergence culture metaphorically, or

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engage in what Turner calls 'decorative theory' (2000: xiv). However, it does seem that, regarding the role of minority community, media people of all walks of life – provided they have access to the skills and resources necessary in our increasingly 'plug and play' world – use media to be part of as well as distance themselves from certain 'groups' (as defined by age, gender, race, class, nationality, religion, and so on), and produce media much the same way. Wellman (2002) has effectively shown how the conceptualization of community groups is flawed, as one should talk of social networks instead. The concept of networks allows more room for the flexible, fluid and dynamic character of the ways in which people connect (or disconnect) with other people and institutions, thus also constantly reconfiguring their identity. As Bauman argues: 'the freedom to change any aspect and trapping of individual identity is something most people deem today to be attainable right away, or at least they view it as a realistic prospect for the near future' (2004: 84). Although Wellman and Bauman could be considered to be too optimistic about the relative freedom people have to change the 'trappings' of their community or identity, it is important to build an element of flexibility into our conceptualizations of ethnicity, nationality, community, identity and the ways in which these are expressed in media content, production and consumption. The relevance of these three arguments is to show analytically how the concern about and study of ethnic media can be too limited in its parameters, as the elements and characteristics of ethnic media production and consumption can be found within broader contemporary social (and economical) phenomena that implicate the way we think about (and study) the relationships individuals and social networks have with and through media and society.

Towards a multicultural convergence culture

Before considering the historicity and structural nature of people becoming the media, I want to discuss briefly the characteristics generally ascribed to what we can perhaps describe as an emerging multicultural convergence culture. The key element of such a convergence media culture is participation. Considering the concerns of a fragmented and individualized society and a general decline in traditional social capital as defined by people's trust and in politics, institutions such as church and state, and to some extent others (see Putnam, 2004 for an international overview), it may be counter-intuitive to claim that a more engaged and participatory culture is emerging. Yet that is exactly what is going on if one looks at the field of media. Ever since the mid-20th century so-called 'alternative' media have more or less successfully emerged next to, and sometimes in symbiotic relationships with, other forms

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of community media (Atton, 2001) under corporate, family or individual ownerships. One could think of pirate radio stations, small-scale print magazines, local newspapers and radio stations, community-based Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) and Usenet newsgroups on internet since the 1980s, and later on a wide range of genres on the web such as community portal sites, group weblogs, voluntary news services, and so on. What scholars of alternative (Atton 2001) and media (Rodriguez, 2001) have not considered, but that should be mentioned in the context of this essay, is the fact that much of this community-oriented and sometimes participatory media-making takes place within the walls of mainstream and distinctly commercial media organizations, as the work of Jenkins (2006) shows in particular.

The level of participatory production within the media system has increased throughout the century. Participation as a principal component of media culture has also been established and acknowledged in mainstream journalisms, with functions like newspaper ombudsmen and reader representatives becoming an accepted part of newsroom organizations worldwide (starting in Japan and Sweden in the early 20th century, in the 1960s in the USA and expanding there in the 1980s, during the 1990s in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe). Journalists, journalism scholars and media critics have correspondingly called for journalism to become more responsible, responsive and transparent – particularly since the late 1980s (Rosen, 1999; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; Van Dalen and Deuze, 2005). Some industry observers have called on mainstream journalism to prepare itself for an upcoming era of participatory news and 'we media', suggesting how the cultural industries in general, much like manufacturing (Von Hippel, 2005) or journalism in particular (Gillmor, 2004), will become creative industries in terms of a more interactive, responsive, and collaborative relationship with former publics (Hartley, 2005). It is in this particular context where I see minority community media, functioning as a sometimes commercial yet also communal and reciprocal link between media makers and media users.

Participation also has a political dimension, as it ties in with a shift in the identity of citizens in Western elective democracies from a rather passive 'informed' or 'informational' citizenry to a rights-based, monitorial and voluntarist citizenry (Schudson, 1995; Hartley, 1996). This shift, occurring from the mid-20th century to the early 21st century as, for example, Schudson (1999) and Norris (2001) document, entails a notion of citizens who have become increasingly willing and able to voice their concerns and claim their place in society – but do so (and often only) whenever they feel their personal (including familial, communal and sometimes regional, national or global single-issue) interests are at stake. As far as media go, this means people can be complacently passive 'couch potatoes' consuming the products of mass media

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for most of their time, but become directly engaged participants in some local or global civic sphere when issues are involved which they have prioritized for themselves and/or their particular social networks. In this context Wellman signals a shift in the 20th century from group to glocalized relationships at work and in the community, defining this 'glocalization' as 'the combination of intense local and extensive global interaction' (2002: 11). Not only does this perspective contribute to an explanation of the growth and success of diasporic media (Georgiou, 2005), this also helps us to recognize the complex ways in which people use and make media to engage with certain networks in different ways. For example: whereas first and second generation immigrants might use ethnic media as a source of information on the homeland, the third generation may use it as a way to enable a dialogue with parents or grandparents, and the fourth generation might be interested in ethnic media in a search for 'roots'. Of course, this is not to say that all media use is essentially deliberate. All media using and making is an expression of motivation and distraction, and thus should be understood within a wider context of belonging and distancing. Such a perspective can contribute in a meaningful way to an explanation of the distinctively recent growth and popularity of ethnic media.

Participation as a core element of the currently emerging media culture also has its roots in 'DIY' (Do-It-Yourself) culture, particularly flourishing during the 1990s, with people increasingly claiming the right to be heard rather than be spoken to – such as is the case of the traditional mass media broadcasting model. Hartley (1999) describes how this kind of self-righteous 'DIY citizenship', as opposed to a model of cultural citizenship corresponding with the era of mass media, now also incorporates notions of mutuality, solidarity, interactivity and the freedom to choose affiliations. It is tempting to claim people in contemporary (Western) democracies have become apathetic and complacent consumers hell-bent on shopping and watching reality television, celebrity news or soap operas next to retreating into their own narrowly defined media spaces which can take the form of ethnic media, if a narrow definition of social capital and civic engagement is used. In a broader sense of this argument, it seems clear that people not only have come to expect participation from the media, they have increasingly found ways to enact this participation in the multiple ways they use and make media. It is exactly this element of participation that transnational media corporations seem to be struggling with, but what all kinds of local, community, minority and alternative media have relied on since the earliest days of the printing press. As with so many other social developments, the internet can be seen as a worldwide amplifier of this trend. The internet must be understood in terms of the social networks it resembles in its infrastructure and use, and thus how

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the internet itself is neither a historically inevitable or fixed medium, just like groups, networks, or identities are not (compare Hall, 1997 on 'old' and 'new' identities and ethnicities with Thomas and Wyatt, 1999 on previous and ongoing patterns of design and use of the internet). Manovich explicitly considers the emergence of a global post-industrial cultural logic as 'the desire to creatively place together old and new in various combinations' (2003: 3), describing this process using the metaphor of 'remix' and applying it to the mixing of media content and form, of national and cultural traditions, characters and sensibilities, as well as between culture and computers. In doing so, he extends earlier developments in new media theory towards an integrated perspective of 'old' and 'new' (similar to the work of Bolter and Grusin, 1999, on remediation, and on mediamorphosis by Fidler, 1997) into the realm of what he calls a globally emerging information culture. Again, the relevance of such broad considerations for thinking about ethnic media and society is the way this broadens our gaze to include broader social phenomena as frames for reference. The comments offered here, for example, contribute to an explanation of why and how minorities not only increasingly use ethnic and diasporic media, but also more or less deliberately use mainstream local, regional and national media – and yes, sometimes do not survey the news offered through any medium at all. This can be seen as a process of transformation and adaptation particular to the migrant condition, but in the same vein can be considered to be an expression of a wider social trend particular to the cultural, political, economical and technological convergence of 'being' in the world today.

Discussion

Throughout this article I have conflated using media with making media, and used this convergence culture to rethink contemporary concerns regarding the growth and success of ethnic/minority media in the context of individualized and globalized (Western) societies. My argument thus may seem a bit more optimistic regarding the presumed 'effects' of a proliferation and fragmentation of media and public discourse, deliberately embracing people's agency vis-a-vis multinational media corporations on the one hand and small-scale entrepreneurial media organizations on the other. If one adds internet to this mix – with its blogs, podcasts, homepages, portal sites, mailing lists, discussion groups, and collaboratively authored software (open source), news (Indymedia), and encyclopedia (Wikipedia) – I find it hard to be pessimistic about the opportunities for a lively, albeit distributed and thus dispersed, public sphere.

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People have always 'become the media', but it is through the lens of increased visibility of minorities and their media in the Western world and the proliferation of internet use that this praxis reached a stage up close and personal to observers of media and society. This to some extent suggests that research aimed at how people 'receive' media has been looking in the wrong direction, perhaps to some extent blinded by the omnipresence and ubiquitousness of global mass media. In this context Livingstone (2003: 85) remarks: 'it is thought-provoking that, increasingly, without people's physical and hence visible participation in the process of communication, there will be neither text nor reception in the first place.' In other words, if we consider media use, we must consider it parallel with media production, as media in general and journalisms in particular have come to be seen as facilitators of (peer-to-peer) communication and connectivity rather than distributors of (business-to-consumer) content (see also Odlyzko, 2001; Deuze, 2003). The emerging literature on participatory media culture as it relates to journalism heralds new roles for journalists as bottom-up facilitators and moderators of community-level conversations among citizens rather than functioning as top-down storytellers for an increasingly disinterested public (Gillmor, 2004). Researchers at the American Press Institute, for example, predict: 'The closed and proprietary media business models of the past will give way to open models that facilitate transactions in which consumers create, compile, edit, share and distribute content' (2005: 3). If anything, the conclusion seems to be that journalism must re-engage with its audience as fellow citizens rather than potential customers – a role for journalism long played most effectively by any kind of ethnic, minority, community, alternative or otherwise non-mainstream (and in some instances, non-White) media.

If we accept for a moment that the typical features of the currently visible media culture are P2P ('peer-to-peer') in organization and participatory in principle, Uricchio urges a cautionary approach, referring to the political economy of a fragmented yet highly corporatized and concentrated media landscape:

> The project of using culture as a way of constructing and maintaining identity and as a space for the enactment of an expanded notion of citizenship contrasts sharply with the use of culture as commodity and the recasting of citizen into consumer. (2004: 84)

Indeed, the increasing popularity of ethnic media as profiled by the NCM (2005) survey is also a commercial success. As argued earlier, in a multicultural society where 'minorities' in some instances (as in Los Angeles, Rotterdam or Paris) can be just as much White as non-White, producing ethnic media is a sound marketing strategy. It is on this economic level that the real power of an explanation of ethnic media's success resides. The sheer number of individuals

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in contemporary Western society with a migrant background provides excellent fodder for marketing departments, just as much as their relatively smaller numbers in the past contribute to an explanation for why mainstream news media in North America and Western Europe for a long time could not be bothered to pay much attention to non-White citizens (other than as 'problem people'). The role and function of minority community media today, however, is just as much a function of the changing relationships between media, culture and society as it is an expression of patterns of increased or ongoing worldwide migration.

Perhaps the argument as outlined in this article can offer some conceptual tools to engage in (action) research regarding these minority media, rather than lamenting the possible consequences of a fragmented media market for an ideal-typical public sphere. Indeed, the public domain must be seen in terms of what Lessig (2004: 282) in the context of the World Wide Web has called a 'creative commons', where people for a variety of reasons and with different agendas contribute their views, skills, resources and time to issues of special or public interest. The earlier mentioned 'State of the News Media 2004' report concluded that despite the growth of ethnic media, most of these media still had a local focus and were not owned by large chains or corporations. If anything, this means that there is a real potential here for civic engagement and cultural diversity – especially given the illustrated trend of people increasingly becoming or claiming their own media. Granted, this pluralism may not bring everybody in society together in one common conversation about the road ahead. But if we were to accept for a moment that social cohesion in a Habermasian public sphere is and always has been a normative ideal-type rather than something related to people's lived reality, and we could embrace the contemporary convergence culture of making and using media, perhaps our research agenda regarding ethnic or minority media should focus more on the parameters that enable each and everyone to contribute, rather than implicitly assuming that mainstream, corporate and national or even global journalisms can or should somehow be held responsible for bringing everyone back into the fold.

Note

1 A note regarding the use of 'mainstream' and other journalisms, and regarding the conceptualization (in this article) of community media. My discussion of alternative and community media does not intend to suggest a clear boundary exists between the practices, content or usage of journalism produced by, for example, an Independent Media Center online and the headquarters of BBC news. In drawing a distinction between mainstream and other journalisms I follow the work of authors like Downing, Atton, Jankowski and Prehn, and Rodriguez, who have

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identified certain characteristics of community and citizen's media that deviate from the traditional ways in which large corporations and news organizations produce news. The most important element in all of this is the level of citizen participation in the process of gathering, selecting, producing (and owning) news; this level tends to be lowest among the traditional news media elite (in television one could think of organizations like CNN, BBC, ZDF; in print I refer to titles like *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Washington Post*, *Die Zeit*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *The Independent*), and highest among small-scale grassroots media (such as Indymedia or OhmyNews online, and all kinds of public access television and community radio stations offline). Again, this is not to say the BBC does not offer some form of participatory storytelling (it does, online at http://news.bbc.co.uk), nor that Indymedia activists never moderate, filter or edit content (they do, which process is made transparent through IMC-mailing lists, and an editorial policy is particular to each local Indymedia site, see http://www.indymedia.org). Following this argument, I do not want to suggest community media are not wholly or partially commercial enterprises, regardless of the level of citizen participation in the media production process.

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Biographical notes

Mark Deuze is Assistant Professor at Indiana University's Department of Telecommunications, and is consultant to the Journalism and New Media program at Leiden University, the Netherlands. He received his PhD in the Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His work focuses on the relationships between media production, technology and society and has appeared in print in a number of Dutch and English books and journals (including *Journalism Quarterly*, *Journalism Studies* and *New Media & Society*).
Address: 727 S Jordan Ave., 47401 Bloomington, Indiana, USA. [email: mdeuze@indiana.edu]

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